

EFFECTIVE ADVOCACY-SEVEN STEPS AND PROCEDURES TO FOLLOW

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Step 1. Join Support-Group Organizations

An excellent source of information about advocacy, educational, medical, and legal issues. When parents join such groups, e.g. the International Dyslexia Association, Children and Adults with Attention Deficit Disorder, the Tourette Association of America, Oklahoma Chapter, Tourette Association of America, and the Autism Society they learn new ways to help their child.

Step 2. Organize Your Child's File

Do you have a complete copy of your child's entire file? Are all documents filed in reverse chronological order? Because special education generates so much paper, many parents throw documents away, or toss them away in boxes. If you don't have a system to manage paper, you won't be able to find important information when you need it. To organize your child's file, you need to get copies of all evaluations, IEPs, correspondence, medical reports, and other information about your child from all sources. Also, you are entitled to a complete copy of your child's file from the school. And remember, the law says the school may charge a "reasonable" photocopying fee. Effective Advocacy includes the possession of documents, records and comprehensive paper trails. Good records are essential to effective advocacy. Also keeping a record of your contacts with the school: calendars, logs, journals-this includes keeping a log of telephone calls, meetings, conversations, consent forms, and correspondence between you and the school. See more information at: <http://www.wrightslaw.com/>

Step 3. Learn to Measure Educational Progress

Is your child benefiting from special education? Is your child progressing? What objective evidence do you have that supports your position? To learn how to measure educational progress, download and read "Understanding Tests and Measurements".

http://www.wrightslaw.com/advoc/articles/tests_measurements.html

Step 4. Chart Your child's test scores, IEP documents, how progress is measured, and how parents will be informed.

When you measure your child's educational progress, it's helpful to chart the test scores. It's easy to do this with a spreadsheet program like MS Excel. When you plug in your child's test scores, you can make charts of your child's progress or lack of progress.

Step 5. Learn About Your Rights and Responsibilities and, also teach your child self-advocacy.

Parents Rights in Special Education: Notice of Procedural Safeguards is an Oklahoma State Department of Education document <http://ok.gov/sde/sites/ok.gov.sde/files/SpecEd-ParentsRights-English.pdf>

Step 6. Learn About Assistive Technology, See Assistive Technology Technical Assistance Guidelines for Oklahoma <https://Sde.Ok.Gov/Sites/Ok.Gov.Sde/Files/Speced-Assistivetech.pdf>

Step 7. Become an Educated Consumer

Visit web sites that provide good quality educational and legal information, e.g. LD Online site, <http://www.ldonline.org>

Create Paper Trails

When you deal with a bureaucracy like the Internal Revenue Service or your state tax department, you know that you need to keep detailed records. Many parents do not realize that their school districts are bureaucracies too. Keep a record of your contacts with the school. Your log should include telephone calls and meetings, conversations, and correspondence between you and the school. Keep copies of all letters, reports, and consent forms. Also see: <http://www.wrightslaw.com/advoc/articles/advo.create.trails.htm>

Train yourself to write things down *"If a statement is not in writing, it was not said."*

If you have a dispute with the school, your contact log is independent evidence that supports your memory. Make your requests in writing. Write polite follow-up letters to document events, discussions, and meetings. Documentation that supports your position is a key to resolving disputes early. Your tools are simple:

1. Logs
2. Calendars
3. Journals

Documents, Support, Memories, and Testimony

Approach schools from a cooperative, **NOT** an adversarial perspective. If you have a dispute with the school, you should assume that you will testify about your recollections. Memories are unreliable and influenced by emotions. If your problems boil down to your word against the word of a school employee, you are not likely to prevail without proper documentation. However, if your recollections are supported by a journal, contact log or calendar that describes the problem or event, you will be in a stronger position. Your journal or log should be contemporaneous -- that is, written when the events or incidents occurred. If you can produce a letter that describes what the school agreed to do or refused to do, your position will be stronger. If the school asks you to sign a consent or permission form, get a copy for your records. Your copy establishes what you agreed to.

Documents Answer Questions

Documents provide answers to "Who, What, Why, When, Where, How and Explain" questions.

1. What services or supports did the school agree to provide?
2. What services or supports did the school refuse to provide?
3. What reasons did the school give for their refusal?
4. Who attended the meeting when these decisions were made?
5. Why was the parent not advised about this meeting?
6. When was this meeting held?
7. When did the parent receive the IEP in the mail?
8. When did the school inform the parent about this change in program and placement?
9. Explain how the new IEP was implemented.

Logs, Calendars, and Journals

Your Contact Log

Use a log to document all contacts between you and the school. Your log should include telephone calls, messages, meetings, letters, and notes between you and the school staff.

Figure 1 a contact log for telephone calls

Figure 1	Contact Log: Telephone Calls, emails, meetings
1. Who	
2. When	
3. What you wanted	
4. What you were told	
5. Notes	

Figure 2 logging a school phone call

Figure 2	Contact Log: Telephone call from parent to school
1. Who	Emily Jones, Guidance Counselor. 555-1212
2. When	09/30/01, 9:15 am
3. What you wanted	Requested information about accommodations that Mark will receive when he takes state achievement test next week.
4. What you were told	Mrs. Jones will put information in an envelope. I will pick it up at the school after 4 pm tomorrow.
5. Notes	

Figure 3 logging a problem

Figure 3	Contact Log: Telephone call from school to parent
1. Who	Dr. Matthews, assistant principal. 444-1212
2. When	09/25/01, 10:15 am
3. What you wanted	He left message on my office voicemail to advise that he suspended Chris from school again.
4. What you were told	Did not speak to him. I called him at school 3 times today. He did not return my calls.
5. Notes	This is 3rd time Chris has been suspended since school started 3 weeks ago.

Figure 4 documenting conversations and meetings

Figure 4	Contact Log Entry: Meeting with teacher
1. Who	Meeting with Mrs. Smith, social studies teacher, about Joey's grades and need for accommodations.
2. When	09/25/01 at 3:30 pm
3. What you wanted	Want Mrs. Smith to provide the accommodations in Joey's IEP.
4. What you were told	She is stressed out because she has 15 special ed kids and no help. She doesn't believe in accommodations. Says they are unfair to other kids.
5. Notes	Joey is failing social studies.

Your Calendar

Many parents like to record their appointments in a monthly or "Year at a Glance" calendar. Calendars can provide good evidence about meeting dates, times, and who attended. Write a description of what happened at the meeting in your journal or log and do not throw your calendar away at the end of the year!

Your Journal

Your journal is like a diary and should be clear and legible. If you request a due process hearing, your journal may be important evidence in your child's case. Your writings, journals, logs, calendars, and letters may be subpoenaed by the school district. Assume that school personnel and their attorney will read your papers. Stick to the facts. Do not use the journal to report your feelings and frustrations. When you write into your journal, write to the Stranger who has the power to fix problems. When the Stranger reads your journal, the Stranger will understand your perspective and want to fix your problems.

Your Problem Report Worksheet

Do you have frequent or ongoing problems with the school – frequent suspensions, homework problems, teacher problems? You can use the Problem Report worksheet to document ongoing school problems. If you have several Problem Reports about the same issue, this is evidence that your child’s program or placement is not appropriate.

Date: _____/_____/_____

Problem: _____

People involved: _____

Facts:

- 1. What happened? _____
 - 2. When did it happen? _____
 - 3. Who was involved? _____
 - 4. Where did it happen? _____
 - 5. Why did it happen? _____
 - 6. Who witnessed? _____
 - 7. What action did school take? _____
 - 8. What action did you take? _____
- Other facts: _____

Resources:

- 1. Oklahoma State Department of Education <http://www.ok.gov/sde/>
- 2. Oklahoma St. Depart. of Educ. Medical Report <http://ok.gov/sde/sites/ok.gov.sde/files/SpecEdMedReport.pdf>
- 3. Section 504 Information, also see your school district (i.e. your Local Education Agency, LEA) – for Civil Rights Compliance procedures <https://sde.ok.gov/section-504>
- 4. Tourette Association of America Oklahoma Chapter <https://tourette.org/chapter/ok/>
- 5. Tourette Association of America <https://tourette.org/>
- 6. Dispute Resolution <https://sde.ok.gov/special-education-dispute-resolution>

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